

## Don't assume that all people have leadership skills

I've been a student of leadership for forty years. In 1980 I defended my doctoral dissertation on strategic planning and I've continued to study the topic of leadership since then.

One fallacy I constantly see is the assumption that someone can lead well even though he or she has never had any training or experience in leadership.

This approach doesn't work in other professions: to become a doctor, accountant, or pilot, one must study for years; degrees and certifications must be earned. Sadly, there is no such criteria for leadership. Anyone can call herself a CEO, manager, entrepreneur, or leader and not get arrested for practicing without a license.

Contrary to popular sentiment, leaders are not "born"; leaders are "made." There is no "leadership gene" that some people are fortunate to have been born with and others are lacking. Just as it takes years of training to become a commercial pilot, it takes focused training to become a good leader.

Said differently, an effective leader must develop certain skills. For instance, a leader is responsible for formulating the mission, vision, goals, and plans for her organization. But without training, most people don't even know what these elements are, how they differ, and how they are related. Leaders are also responsible for selecting quality team members (it could be argued that this is the leader's most important task), but many people who serve in a leadership position have had no training in this area.

We must not even assume that a professional degree qualifies someone to lead in his field. For instance, just because a physician is good at his job doesn't mean he can lead well in his field. Nor should we assume that because an individual has achieved a professional degree or certification (physician, accountant) in one particular field, that he will lead well in other fields. For instance, the post-nominal M.D. doesn't automatically qualify someone to be a leader in his church, mosque, or synagogue. Knowing how to read x-rays doesn't prepare one to make important organizational decisions. Similarly, a degree in theology (learning ancient languages, apologetics, preaching, systematic theology) does not equip one to lead well—leadership requires a separate skill set.

Many non-profit organizations put people into leadership positions simply because they embrace the organization's core values or because they have achieved professional status in another field, or both. These qualifications may be necessary but they are not sufficient. To lead well one must possess leadership skills.

[Here's a list](#) of 12 important leadership skills.